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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000201

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: HASHIMI WARNS AGAINST WITHDRAWAL, ADVOCATES SUNNI
ENGAGEMENT

Classified By: Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad per 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: Iraqi Vice-President Tariq al-Hashimi told CODEL Brownback on January 9 that a withdrawal of coalition forces would send the wrong message to Iraqis and to the world. He called for a compact for Sunni engagement and pushed for the call-up of former Iraqi Army reserves as a way to quickly increase the numbers and abilities of the IA. He called region formation a "recipe for dividing Iraq" and said U.S engagement with Iran would be like "shaking hands with the Devil." END SUMMARY.

U.S. Making Mistakes, but Pullout Not the Answer

12. (C) Hashimi warned the Senator a withdrawal of coalition forces would show the world that the U.S. is making decisions based on its own interests rather than Iraq's interests. Iraq was supposed to be the great model for the Middle East in terms of development, he said, and pulling out would make that impossible. He said he tried to press Washington on a timetable for withdrawal from Iraq but was told the U.S. cannot pursue a policy that would look like a defeat. He said President Bush has repeated many times that he will stay the course - a shift away from that would not serve U.S. or Iraq interests.

13. (C) Despite that, he told the Senator the U.S. is committing grave mistakes in Iraq; even Secretary Rice admitted that the U.S. has made mistakes since the invasion. He said U.S. actions in Iraq are completely destroying its image. Brownback asked if this means the U.S. should pull back. Hashimi said no, the U.S. needs to share the responsibility of rebuilding the MOI and MOD. As they stand, he has no confidence in the national security forces. The problem is not just sectarian, he said, criminal elements are at play as well. The question is who will shoulder the responsibilities.

Bringing in the Sunnis

14. (C) He told the senator that he can question why Sunnis are killing U.S. troops, but the U.S. has not submitted a compact to bring in the Sunnis and encourage their participation. He said he gave President Bush and Secretary Rice a copy of such a proposal when he was in

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Washington. Its implementation would lead to Sunni buy-in; the insurgents have told him they are ready to reach an accommodation. He asked the insurgents why they are

killing Americans when they are not the threat, and they replied that they are waiting for an offer.

¶5. (C) CoR member Ayad Samaraie said increasing numbers are fighting AQ in Al Anbar, but they need encouragement - they cannot be expected to fight AQ and then be targeted or arrested by the GOI or Americans the next day. Hashimi said funding from Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Syria would help in the fight against Al Qaeda.

Restructuring the Armed Forces

¶6. (C) Brownback said he understands Hashimi's position but urged him to consider the situation in the U.S. He said many U.S. citizens want to pull out of Iraq. Some see it as a Sunni-Shia fight and want no part of it. He told Hashimi that he envisions staying in Iraq no longer than a year to 18 months. Hashimi said that is enough time to use a "scientific approach" to restructure the armed forces. There are many ex-army reserves that could be ready to fight after a 2-3 month orientation. He said that there are whole units that could be recalled rather than focusing on recruiting individuals. He suggested designating a rendezvous point for the units and then checking their records and turning away the Saddam loyalists. He said that this "kills two birds with one stone" because ex-officers are a major part of the insurgency, in part because they need jobs and money.

¶7. (C) When the Senator asked why they had not joined the army yet if they were interested in fighting Hashimi said the recruiting centers are run by Shia who turn away Sunnis or divert them to dangerous assignments. He acknowledged that there would be hesitation from his colleagues in the

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government who would like the army to remain sectarian.

Regions Will Divide the Country

¶8. (C) Turning to the issue of regions, the Senator said the Iraqi constitution allows for creating regions, why not encourage them. Hashimi replied that the Sunnis see this as a recipe for dividing Iraq. He said there is a contradiction within the constitution on regional and central control. He said that oil, gas, water and other disputes could be exacerbated by forming regions. This could lead to more chaos and spread to other regions. He held up Basrah as an example, explaining that they do not want to share their resources with other provinces that have none. He admitted that establishing three regions might improve the security situation.

¶9. (C) Asked why Baghdad could not become a federal city like Washington DC, he said there is an ethnic cleansing of the Sunnis taking place in Baghdad. Soon the whole capital will be Shia, an unacceptable result for the Sunnis. Imposing federalism is tantamount to declaring civil war in any of the mixed areas of the country, he said.

Negative on U.S. Engagement with Iran

¶10. (C) Senator Brownback asked how the U.S. should deal with the Iranians and suggested options such as a diplomatic dialogue or economic engagement. Hashimi told the Senator that engaging the Iranians right now would send a message that the U.S. is willing to "shake hands with the Devil" in order to extricate itself from Iraq. This will shape the Iraqi perspective, he said. He said someone else, such as the Arab League or the UN, should engage the

Iranians. He said a UN sponsored conference would be more likely to get participation from the region. Brownback replied that this avenue had been explored, but the UN pulled out. Brownback then asked if the GOI would accept troops from Gulf countries. Hashimi said they would not, but the U.S. could impose it.

¶11. (C) Ayad Samaraie warned the Senator that Iran will not stop with Iraq if the U.S. pulls out of the country. They will head to Syria, Jordan, the Gulf, and elsewhere. He said the Sunnis could help Iraq succeed, but they have had no chance to participate. Hashimi said Iran is still educating their young people that Iraq was part of Iran. Asked if Iraq would be better without Iranian influence, Hashimi said yes.

KHALILZAD